

POLLING PLACE PRIMING: STUDYING THE EFFECTS OF PATRIOTIC SYMBOLS ON  
AMERICAN VOTER CHOICES

A Thesis  
by  
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## **Abstract**

### **POLLING PLACE PRIMING: STUDYING THE EFFECTS OF PATRIOTIC SYMBOLS ON AMERICAN VOTER CHOICES**

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Priming has been shown to have a powerful effect upon the mind of voters. Previous scholarship has demonstrated that something as simple as the location and surroundings of voters can modify their choices to a significant degree. Polling places in America typically decorate their sites with patriotic imagery. This paper is the result of an investigation into whether or not such patriotic imagery primes voters' minds to favor one political party or philosophy over another. I hypothesize that patriotic priming would boost tendencies to identify and support conservative/Republican policies and preferences. A simple experimental design in which some participants were primed with patriotic symbols (e.g., the American flag) while completing a survey about their political preferences revealed mixed results. There were several significant results in political preferences that followed the predictions of the hypothesis, though these results were not a majority of the policy preferences tested. Furthermore, some unexpected anomalies occurred. Technical issues clouded some of the results, however, and rendered many of the responses suspect. Results suggest further investigation into this subject is warranted, under tighter conditions and with a larger and more diverse participant pool from which to draw.



### **Dedication**

To my mother Carolyn, without whom I could never have achieved this.

And for Natalie, who never lost faith in me.

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First and Foremost, my friend Mike, whose patient tutoring in mathematics was essential to my graduation.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Every two years, American voters congregate at their various respective polling locations, and make important decisions on local, state, and national policy. Not only are various representatives and public servants chosen, but countless referendums, bond votes, and state constitutional amendments are often determined by a direct vote of the people. In the buildup to the election, voters are exposed to massive amounts of advertising by the various factions of the electoral process. Each candidate, political party, and interest group bombards the voters with messages and images to provoke a vote in their favor. The polling place, however, is an area that is meant to be a sea of calm, devoid of political messages. Nevertheless, even within these supposedly neutral environments, there is evidence that vote priming may occur. Previous studies have shown that the building a poll takes place in can affect the outcome of voter choices (Berger, Meredith, & Wheeler, 2006). This proposal takes these previous studies and goes one step further; simply put, can the décor and furnishings of a polling location— the environment surrounding the voting booth itself— prime the voting public to favor one end of the political spectrum over the other?

This proposal does not intend to suggest any objection to patriotism. A healthy sense of civic duty to one's country is in fact conducive to voting (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). However, the fact remains that while both the major political parties of the United States invoke patriotic imagery and language when making their case for election, support, and programs, the Republican Party enjoys a significant advantage in the public mind with patriotism, far more so than the Democrat Party does (Petrocik, Benoit, & Hansen, 2004).

With this in mind, I propose to investigate the following hypothesis: *Patriotic priming elements present at otherwise identical polling locations will cause a shift in subjects voting patterns to the more conservative side of the political spectrum.*

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

My central argument is that individuals can be subtly primed with patriotic symbols at the voting booth, and that such exposure will shift Americans' political preferences in a more conservative direction. Mendelberg (2001), in her landmark work *The Race Card*, demonstrated how implicit cues evoke racial resentment; moreover, those who were experiencing these priming effects had absolutely no idea they were being manipulated by these subtle cues. Krosnick and Kinder (1990) demonstrated media's role in priming the voting public, showing that voters can be influenced in their assessment of political elites based on repetition in mass media. Valentino, Hutchings, and White (2002) showed that pre-existing links, or issue ownership, are quite effective in influencing voter choice, which suggests that it is the combination of cue and context, not merely the presence of cues themselves, that triggers the priming effect. This phenomenon, of voter preference manipulation via priming through symbols for political response, is at the heart of my study, as I hypothesize that participants will be manipulated into political choices they might not otherwise make and have no conscious awareness of this effect.

Billig (1995) demonstrated how "banal nationalism," the ever-present existence of patriotic symbols in the background of everyday life, can provoke reflexive responses in favor of national attachment without the responding subject ever being aware of the change in attitude or action. Billig's work strongly supports the theory that context matters greatly in determining the level of influence these nationalistic symbols may possess. Through the course of three separate studies, Butz, Plant, and Doerr (2007) demonstrated how the mere sight of an American flag, even if not consciously noticed or remembered afterwards, can have a strong effect on individual opinions, rendering the participants in their studies more egalitarian. Hassin and Ferguson (2007) showed a similarly influential effect of American cues on those who watch television news regularly, although

this time the prime resulted in a connection to aggression and violence. These connections arose regardless of the political preferences of the participants, and it is theorized that watching the news and seeing American military forces engaging in warfare (following the 9/11 attacks) created a connection in these participants' minds that was triggered by the priming cues. Moreover, there is significant research to suggest that American flags prime for nationalism but not necessarily patriotism. Kimmelmeir and Winter (2008) investigated this question and came away with deeply concerning results: "Across two studies we did not find any evidence that the American flag aroused a sense of patriotism; rather, only nationalist views were increased in the presence of the flag, which cast the United States as superior and dominant to the remainder of the world" (Kimmelmeir & Winter, 2008, p. 871).

Priming effects are not limited to those involving long term exposure, either. Short term environmental effects on priming have been well documented in recent literature. Kay, Wheeler, Bargh, and Ross (2004) demonstrated that something as simple as being exposed to items in a corporate office setting could not only alter participants' behavior, but also affect their perception of the behavior of other participants within the test setting. Hassin, Ferguson, Shidlovski, and Gross (2007) showed that a visual cue, even when expressed subliminally, could be effective in altering subjects' immediate political choices. Their 2007 study of political priming amongst Israeli citizens showed that the presence of an Israeli national flag caused a narrowing of political views between participants who scored high on a nationalism scale and those who scored low, resulting in a movement to the center for a majority of the test subjects regardless of normal political preferences.

Berger, Meredith, and Wheeler (2006) engaged in research that went even further than that of Hassin et al., showing that in a real world setting, environment has an immediate and measureable effect on voter choice. Their analysis of voter response in the state of Arizona's 2000 election showed robust evidence for voter location having a significant effect on voter choice. Berger et al. concluded that when voters did their polling at schools, a relatively common occurrence in America (in fact, 26% of the polling places in this study were schools), support was significantly higher for the increase



in a state sales tax for the support of schools. This support was robustly significant when measured using three different statistical models. Interestingly, Berger et al. double-checked their models with other referendum items on the same ballot to observe whether or not voting in a school affected all referendums proposed or not, and they found that only two of the 13 referendums resulted in a statistically significant correlation. In short, not only does voting in a school tend to cause voters to support policies that are beneficial for schools, but this effect is also very exact, producing negligible results on other policy issues. If the real world environment of a school can affect votes cast within it, then it is quite probable that the patriotically-themed environment of a typical American polling place could have a similar effect on citizens casting their votes.

Having established that priming affects voting behavior, what evidence is there that patriotic priming works to the advantage of more conservative issues and parties? There is considerable evidence in the literature that the Republican Party—the major conservative political party within the American two-party system—possesses “issue ownership” of multiple values and issues that are generally linked to American patriotic symbols. Egan (2008) concludes that many concepts, including national defense, anti-terrorism, and being tough on crime, are consistently linked to the Republican Party in the minds of the American populace. Egan maintains that Americans have an intuitive, automatic conviction in the competence and trustworthiness of Republicans with respect to these values. Egan goes on to discuss how issue ownership is a long-term process, taking decades to build up and lasting just as long. Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen (2004) come to similar conclusions with respect to their own research of American presidential elections. Their research investigated issue ownership and presidential campaigns from 1952 to 2000. Petrocik et al. concluded that in the minds of the voting public, defense, morality, and being tough on crime all corresponded significantly and consistently with the Republican Party. This view is echoed by the scholarship of Iyengar (2011), who states that issue ownership is not only socialized at a young age in America, but also that Republicans own the issues of “national security, defense, and foreign affairs,” while Democrats hold sway over “quality of life issues, including job and income security, healthcare, and social welfare” in

the minds of the American public (Iyengar, 2011, p. 166). The values that Iyengar, Egan, and Petrocik, et al. consider to be issues owned by the Republican Party form the crux of the political questionnaire I utilize in my experiment. It is predicted that these issues will become more important and the conservative policies more preferable to participants under the test conditions. Substantial evidence supporting this hypothesis already exists. Carter, Ferguson, and Hassin (2011) have demonstrated in their research that exposure to the American flag can cause respondents to shift support to the Republican side of the political spectrum, even up to eight months after said exposure. If the stars and stripes can shift voter behavior to be more Republican simply by having seen a flag over half a year previously, then how much more powerful must the collection of flags and patriotic paraphernalia be while present at an actual polling station?

Finally, there has been one scholarly study that closely mirrors my own. Rutchick (2010) conceived and executed a study on voter behavior and setting, concentrating on churches used as polling stations. His results showed significant effects on Christians, with a remarkable specificity towards issues that have some measure of standing in the Christian ethical paradigm (abortion, same sex marriage, etc.), while having little effect on issues that are not specifically religious or Christian in nature (e.g., imminent domain). Given that all voters in the United States are American citizens and have at least some basic level of socialization and connection with patriotic symbols, the presence of such symbols, given the previously mentioned scholarship, could be enough to significantly affect the results of elections.

### **CHAPTER 3: THE EXPERIMENT**

The final research design of my experiment was informed by an initial pilot study I performed a year beforehand. This pilot study experiment included 95 individuals, 61 in the control group, and 34 in the test cohort. All participants were volunteers, students at Appalachian State University. Each cohort was asked to fill out a computerized survey involving their political preferences on a number of current subjects. The test group went first in a primed environment, and the control group took the survey the next day. To see if a primed environment affects voting tendencies, the survey was conducted in both primed and control environments. This pilot study utilized a five-point Likert scale questionnaire made up of excerpts drawn from the American National Election Studies (ANES) survey from 2008 (ANES, 2008). The questions measured the participants' political ideology using 30 questions from the 2008 ANES.

The American National Election Studies surveys have been used to systematically study voter attitudes since 1977. Building on earlier electoral surveys conducted by the University of Michigan, the ANES represents a continual lineage of research and electoral review for over half a century, having surveyed every presidential and mid-term U.S. election since 1952. The surveys are made up of a large battery of questions, each of which is designed and phrased specifically to avoid skewing the results while obtaining accurate and unbiased answers from participants. Using the questions for my own study helped to ensure that as little bias as possible was introduced into the experiment.

The pilot questionnaire consisted of 30 questions designed to measure political preference (ANES, 2008). There was some modest adjustment of the question phrasings, in order to accommodate the five-point Likert scale used by this survey. The questions were the same for both experimental groups. Lastly, the final questions on the survey involved demographic data, including

race, gender, age, and typical political affiliation. These demographic questions came at the end of the survey to prevent any unintentional priming.

The two cohorts were surveyed in Room 015 in the bottom floor of Anne Belk Hall (the computer lab). The computerized survey was operationalized via SurveyGizmo. The computer lab was set up, and a shortcut to the appropriate SurveyGizmo page placed on the desktop of each of the computers in the room. SurveyGizmo allows randomization of selected questions. This allowed me to design a survey with a randomly ordered set of five-point Likert scale questions to prevent unintentional priming, followed by the demographic questions at the end of the survey.

The test cohort was surveyed first on 13 April 2011; the control cohort was surveyed the following day. The first day's testing had the computer lab decorated tastefully with patriotic symbols, including red, white, and blue bunting; American flags; and red, white and blue ribbons. Additionally, the graphics of the SurveyGizmo interface are highly customizable; the interface used for the test cohort was base white with blue trim and red font—red, white, and blue (a sample print-out is available in Appendix 4). Day two (14 April 2011), the computer lab was returned to its normal appearance, with no patriotic decorations at all. The SurveyGizmo user interface was similarly altered to a style that did not include any combination of red, white, and blue. This provided the control cohort a priming-free environment in which to take the survey and provided a baseline from which to measure the test cohort.

The results of the survey were quite interesting. Thirteen questions demonstrated tendencies—not always statistically significant, but generally close to it—of falling within the predicted result; that is, more conservative responses than normal. This result was observed despite the control group strongly self-identifying as conservative. Given the results of this pilot study I decided that further research would be appropriate and developed a second survey protocol.

I decided that the study would be repeated on a larger scale this time and with more thorough questions in the survey. In addition to the original 30 ANES political-preference questions of the first survey and the attending demographic questions, two more sets of questions were added. First, a

selection of questions from Altemeyer's (2007) Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale was included. There are 22 questions in the scale normally; this was culled down to 19 to reduce the length of the survey and avoid repetition. (See Appendix 3 for the entire questionnaire used in the survey.) With these questions included, I could gain a measure of not only how priming affects political policy choices, but also how that same priming may have a more pervasive effect through the individual differences of the participants. This would provide a great deal of context for whatever conclusions were reached, revealing if RWA attributes correlate or moderate the findings on priming efficacy. If so, this would correlate with the findings of Huddy and Khatib (2007) in their study on American patriotism. In their study, particularly with respect to symbolic patriotism, they concluded that "[u]ncritical patriotism is linked to authoritarianism, which is characterized, in turn, by a tendency to defer to authority figures and support them unconditionally. And authoritarians are typically conservative..." (Huddy & Khatib, 2007, p. 64). Other studies, such as Duriez and Van Hiel's (2002), also demonstrate a strong correlation between conservatism and both RWA Social Dominance Orientation.

Schatz, Staub, and Lavine (1999) studied this aspect of political preferences and blind patriotism, as well. Their findings went even further; their study concluded that uncritical patriotism was a strong predictor for political disengagement, nationalism, perceived foreign threats, perceived importance of symbolic actions, and selective exposure to pro-US information sources (Schatz et al., 1999). Indeed, symbolic politics may play a stronger role than anyone heretofore imagined in American politics. Citrin, Rheingold, and Green (1990) engaged in a study of American identity, with respect to politics, ethnic changes in American demography, and symbols of Americanism. In particular, their findings were that for certain symbols of Americanism, particularly language, both liberals and conservatives remained remarkably similar in their attitudes on non-natives in America; speaking English was considered by most of each group, by wide margins, to be a very important facet to belonging to American culture (Citrin et al., 1990). Such conclusions have obvious implications with respect to the research proposed herein. If symbols have effects not merely on

political preferences, but on the political act of voting itself, it would benefit us to know who is most influenced by these symbols and how. While conventional wisdom would suggest that high RWAs would be the most susceptible, Citrin et al. make serious assertions, with substantial evidence, that Left or Right, symbols can influence political opinions and action. With the expanded questionnaire, it may be possible to see if RWA tendencies predict the effect of patriotic priming, or if patriotic priming encourages RWA attitudes and responses in otherwise non-RWA people. Either way, this certainly warrants further study via use of the Right Wing Authoritarian index as a factor in symbolism effecting voting preferences.

Second, a selection of questions measuring Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) were included, to measure if patriotic symbols evoked any response in this context, or if those already pre-disposed to SDO tendencies would be more susceptible to the priming environment. As mentioned above, Duriez and Van Hiel (2002) demonstrated a connection with RWA and SDO. Additionally, their findings concluded that SDO personalities were “positively related to racism, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, external critique, economic conservatism and level of education,” while at the same time no correlation was found between SDO and either the values of security or of cultural conservatism (Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002, pp. 1208-1209). This dichotomy bears further study, and was hoped to eventually bear fruit in my survey. Given the nature of many of the political questions on the survey, previous studies suggest SDO could have a correlation with more conservative tendencies. Van Hiel and Mervielde (2002) found such a connection in their own studies on SDO. Pratto et al. (2000) demonstrated that both sexism and a preference for hierarchy and hegemony were stable aspects of SDO across four different cultures. If SDO tendencies result from being primed with patriotic symbols, then it was expected that the survey answers would show correlations with respect to such issues as affirmative action, immigration, and women’s rights. Social Dominance Orientation and Right Wing Authoritarianism are at the heart of the political psychology of American conservatism, as demonstrated by Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003) in their ground-breaking study on conservatism and motivated cognition. By

including these measures in the study, it was hoped more detailed insight into the subject might be achieved.

While questions involving Right Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation were added, along with an updating of certain ANES questions (altering questions about John McCain to be about Mitt Romney, for example), the number of policy questions had to be reduced to keep the questionnaire to a reasonable timeframe of approximately five to ten minutes for each participant. The final number of policy questions was reduced to 24, down from the original 30. Furthermore, the wording of the questions was altered. Instead of a question specific to each issue, a generic phrase, such as ‘how would you rate your support for the following’ was given, with Likert scales provided for each subject. Likert scales were in the five or ten point range, depending on the section. Changing the phrasing of questions in this manner was intended to speed up the survey taking process and allow easier comprehension by respondents. (See Appendix 2 for the complete ANES section of the survey.)

The computer lab used for the survey was once again Room 015 in Anne Belk Hall, and was decorated in a manner almost identical to the previous pilot study. The exact same decorations were used in similar positions, with the addition of two moderate-sized American flags, which were hung up on the chalkboard and the left wall. Like last time, each wall had decorations of a patriotic nature, and there was nowhere in the room where the decorations were not obviously visible. (Photos of the primed condition are presented in Appendix 1.) The survey was held the first week of April, 2012. Primed conditions were in place on the first two days of the survey (April 2nd and 3rd), and the patriotic decorations were removed for the control cohort, which was surveyed on the following two days (April 4th and 5th). In total, 197 students from Appalachian State University participated in the study.

## Survey Results

The initial results from the second study were mixed. The experiment found no significant correlation between the priming cohort and either the Social Dominance Orientation battery or the Right Wing Authoritarianism questions. Of the 24 policy and political preference questions put forth—again, most adapted from the same 2008 ANES questionnaire as with the previous study—only 17 questions showed any tendency in the predicted direction at all, of which only eight were significant. For instance, support for concealed carry permits for handguns and the Tea Party movement were the only two responses significant at the two-tailed level under primed conditions. In total, results for the death penalty, concealed carry permits, universal health insurance, President Obama, the Federal Government, the Tea Party, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and the military showed significant effects in the predicted manner; while responses for doctor-assisted suicide, liberals, gay marriage, homosexuals, welfare, and raising taxes to decrease the national deficit all showed non-significant results, but in the direction predicted by the hypothesis.

**Table 1:**

*Significant Results, section one (0-10 Likert scale).*

On a scale from 0 to 10, please rate the following political groups, leaders, and other people who are in the news these days. Ratings between 6 and 10 mean that you feel favorable toward the person or group, ratings between 0 and 4 mean that you feel unfavorable, and a rating of 5 means that you do not feel particularly favorable or unfavorable.

Question:	Control group Mean	Test group Mean	Confidence Level
President Obama	5.651	5.107	.084
The Federal Government	5.313	4.929	.094
Military	7.071	7.647	.032



**Table 2:** *Insignificant results conforming to predicted hypothesis- section one (two tailed).*

On a scale from 0 to 10, please rate the following political groups, leaders, and other people who are in the news these days. Ratings between 6 and 10 mean that you feel favorable toward the person or group, ratings between 0 and 4 mean that you feel unfavorable, and a rating of 5 means that you do not feel particularly favorable or unfavorable.

Question	Control group mean	Test group mean	Confidence level
Homosexuals	6.232	6.035	.625
Liberals	5.41	5.247	.645
Democrats	5.58	5.188	.265
Republicans	5.152	5.388	.504
Welfare recipients	4.57	4.4	.576

**Table 3:** *Insignificant results not conforming to predicted hypothesis- section one (two tailed).*

On a scale from 0 to 10, please rate the following political groups, leaders, and other people who are in the news these days. Ratings between 6 and 10 mean that you feel favorable toward the person or group, ratings between 0 and 4 mean that you feel unfavorable, and a rating of 5 means that you do not feel particularly favorable or unfavorable.

Question	Control group mean	Test group mean	Confidence level
Mitt Romney	4.11	4.07	.895
Conservatives	5.268	5.059	.573
Unions	5.375	5.5	.688

**Table 4:** *Significant results, section two (five point Likert scale).*

Please indicate how much you support or oppose each of the following policies:

<b>Question:</b>	<b>Control group Mean</b>	<b>Test group Mean</b>	<b>Confidence Level</b>
Capital Punishment (i.e., the Death Penalty)	3.243	3.505	.067
Allowing concealed carry permits for those who have never been convicted of a crime and have passed a gun safety test*	3.633	3.905	.068
Universal Health Insurance	3.455	3.164	.053
The Tea Party movement	2.598	2.776	.110
The Occupy Wall Street movement*	3.008	2.812	.092

\*2-tailed

**Table 5:** *Insignificant results conforming to predicted hypothesis- Section two (two tailed).*

Please indicate how much you support or oppose each of the following policies:

<b>Question</b>	<b>Control group mean</b>	<b>Test group mean</b>	<b>Confidence level</b>
Allowing same-sex couples to marry legally	3.711	3.635	.702
Using federal funds for embryonic stem cell research	3.348	3.305	.805
Raising taxes to reduce the Federal budget deficit	2.910	2.847	.698

**Table 6:** *Insignificant results not conforming to predicted hypothesis- Section two (two tailed).*

Please indicate how much you support or oppose each of the following policies:

<b>Question</b>	<b>Control group mean</b>	<b>Test group mean</b>	<b>Confidence level</b>
Legalized abortion under any circumstances	2.866	2.952	.672
Building a fence along the U.S.- Mexico border to stop illegal immigration	3.162	3.129	.861
Making it harder to purchase a handgun in the U.S.	3.171	3.214	.817
Teaching intelligent design as an alternative theory to evolution in public schools	3.036	2.835	.234
Assisted Suicide for terminally ill patients	3.098	3.165	.698

Some results were counter-intuitive. For example, support for handgun control and unions increased under the prime, and respondents under the primed condition opposed the teaching of creationism more so than respondents under the control. The dichotomy of increased support for handgun control with increased support for concealed carry permits, both under the primed condition, is puzzling to say the least.

Furthermore, support for both President Obama and Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney dropped under the prime conditions, though only Obama showed significant results. A similar result was observed for the categories of 'conservative' and 'liberal,' with approval of both political labels dropping under primed conditions, though the 'conservative' result was non-significant. One possible explanation for these results could be the popularity of the Tea Party movement at the time. Given that the Tea Party was one of only two issues to receive support under the primed conditions at the two-tailed level, its anti-establishment message may have produced a reaction against both major presidential candidates, as well as the main established political ideologies of America. The result may have produced responses where patriotism is activated, but with an 'anti-government' twist. Further study is warranted, of course.

These results, however, were unfortunately contaminated. A few days after the second survey was complete, it came to my attention that one of the teaching assistants who was kind enough to offer extra credit to her students for taking my exam had, in fact, covered the subject of Right Wing Authoritarianism with her undergraduate students just the week before the survey was conducted. As Valentino, Hutchings, and White (2002) have demonstrated, bringing attention to cues can in fact be used as an 'inoculation' against priming. The discussion of patriotism, patriotic symbols, and their relationship to political power was discussed in these classes and would have provided an 'inoculation' against the priming effects in the test cohort. By using the extra credit sign-up sheets, sorted by date, to determine which of her students had taken the survey, I was able to determine that of the 85 respondents recorded during the first two days of the survey—the period when it was conducted in a primed environment—ten of her students had taken the survey. In other words,

11.77% of the primed sample had been recently ‘counter-primed’, effectively skewing the results against the expected outcome. In a larger sample, this could have washed out in the results. With less than 100 respondents in the sample size, such a skewing could have rendered the results problematic.

While the experimental results were mixed, the results still showed that, even in a situation where over 10% of respondents in the primed condition might have been counter-primed, tendencies in the expected direction were still observed in fully half of the responses, with almost a third showing significance. These results have only served to confirm in my mind the validity of my theory that patriotic priming can have an effect on voter choices. With this in mind, were I to run this experiment again, there are undoubtedly changes I would make.

First, I would not use political science students as subjects. At the very least, I would seek out professors and teacher assistants in other departments- history, math, science, English, and so on. This way I can significantly reduce the odds of a counter-priming influence on the survey. Ideally, I would use students that are not even attending Appalachian State. Caldwell Community College, for example, is not only close by but has a far more diverse student population, particularly with respect to older, non-traditional students, as well as those studying in skilled technical fields, rather than exclusively students seeking four-year degrees. Such a student population would provide a wider range of experiences and world views, better reflecting the population at large and providing a more accurate sampling. I would also prefer to have the survey take place in a more economically and ethnically diverse environment; UNC Charlotte, for example, would be an excellent location for another survey.

Second, I would administer the survey in four parts. Ideally, each of these sections would be administered in separate environments. In keeping with the example above, having three separate community colleges would be ideal although perhaps impractical. Most likely, each section would be administered at least a month or two apart. The first section would be in a low-level primed environment, perhaps with only a single American flag present. This would be in keeping with many of the surveys mentioned in the literature review, and provide a measure of insurance in case the

previous study was over-primed by too many patriotic decorations. The second section would take place in a moderately primed environment, set up as in the previous two surveys, with perhaps the addition of a few images of national landmarks and memorials. This would be in an effort to replicate the patriotic environment of a polling station as closely as possible. The third section would be in a much more obviously primed environment, with at least twice the imagery as the second section. If possible, the third section should be administered within a few days of July 4<sup>th</sup>, providing even more patriotic stimuli. This way, it would be possible to observe whether there is an over-priming effect, or if more patriotic symbols equal even higher levels of response. The fourth section would, of course, be the control, administered at a time wholly apart from July 4<sup>th</sup> or any other patriotic holiday or Election Day, and with no patriotic symbols nearby at all. Ideally, it would not even be held in an election year.

Third, another survey into this subject would greatly benefit from a larger sample size. With 197 in the experiment with the study lasting only four days, it would not be inconceivable to get 250 in five days' time, with proper communication with and assistance from professors, and a suitable motivation (extra credit being the most obvious) for the students to take the survey; the more respondents, the better. Each of the previous studies have been plagued by peculiar statistical artifacts that rendered much of the data unusable; specifically, the strong conservative showing in the control cohort in the pilot study, and the counter-priming event in the second one. Having more participants will tend to alleviate such issues, and would not doubt provide greater insight into the effects of a patriotically primed environment on voter preferences.

## **Conclusions**

While there were issues with the experiment— small size and contamination—it seems that some effect in the hypothesized direction is being achieved by the priming. Results suggesting the accuracy of the hypothesis were achieved in at least half of each survey, even if the levels were not high enough to be significant. That said, considering that the survey had certain idiosyncrasies that weighted the results against the hypothesized outcomes, the fact that there were so many robust

results supporting the hypothesis anyways is encouraging. Had those peculiarities not cropped up, the results would have most likely been much stronger. Even so, a full third of the political questions showed significant response in the predicted direction. This theory has shown enough potential that further study is warranted. Research following up on this survey will almost certainly confirm previous results and augment the body of scholarship on political priming.



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APPENDIX 1: IMAGES OF THE PRIMED CONDITIONS FOR THE SECOND SURVEY.



*Figure 1.* Test lab as seen from the door.



*Figure 2.* View from door, facing right. Note participants faces are blurred for privacy.



*Figure 3.* View of test room, front to back. Again, participant's faces are blurred.



*Figure 4.* Test room, right side of room.





*Figure 5: Test room, view of the front from the back wall. Note door to the left.*



*Figure 6. View of the test room, front view, right side.*

APPENDIX 2: SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR FIRST SURVEY (ANES DESIGNATION IN PARENTHESIS):

- 1) How do you rate Barak Obama? (D1b2)
- 2) How do you rate the Federal Government in Washington? (D2e)
- 3) How do you rate Liberals? (D2g)
- 4) How do you rate Labor Unions? (D2j)
- 5) How do you rate the Military? (D2m)
- 6) How do you rate Big Business (D2n)
- 7) How do you rate people on welfare? (D2p)
- 8) How do you rate conservatives? (D2q)
- 9) How do you rate environmentalists? (D2s)
- 10) How do you rate homosexuals? (D2u)
- 11) How do you rate blacks? (D2y)
- 12) How do you rate rich people? (D2bb)
- 13) How do you rate Muslims? (D2ee)
- 14) How do you rate Christians? (D2gg)
- 15) Do you support lowering the Federal Budget Deficit by raising taxes? (E6b)
- 16) Do you feel controlling and reducing illegal immigration is important? (F1g)

- 17) Do you feel it is the Federal government's job to ensure black people get fair treatment in jobs? (F2a)
- 18) Where would you place yourself on a liberal-conservative scale, with 1 being very liberal and 7 being very conservative? (G1)
- 19) How big do you feel the government ought to be? 1= very small, 7= very large. (H3a-c)
- 20) Women who complain about harassment cause more problems than they solve. (K2c)
- 21) This country would have fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family values (L1d)
- 22) One of the big problems in this country is that we don't give everyone an equal chance (N2c)
- 23) Do you think the Federal government has become so large and powerful that it poses an immediate threat to the rights and freedoms of ordinary citizens? (R8)
- 24) Compared to a year ago, has the amount of crime in your hometown has increased or decreased? 1=Decreased greatly, 4= no change, 7= increased greatly (S2a)
- 25) Compared to a year ago, have the chances of a terrorist of a terrorist attack decreased? (S3a )
- 26) Do you think the United States should have sent troops to fight the war in Iraq in 2003? (Y2)
- 27) We have gone too far pushing equal rights in this country (N2b)
- 28) Do you oppose favoring in hiring and promotion for minorities? (M5-M5a2)
- 29) A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work (M4a)



30) We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards, even if they are different from our own (L1c)

### APPENDIX 3: SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR THE SECOND SURVEY-

#### Section 1, Political Preferences:

On a scale from 0 to 10, please rate the following political groups, leaders, and other people who are in the news these days. Ratings between 6 and 10 mean that you feel favorable toward the person or group, ratings between 0 and 4 mean that you feel unfavorable, and a rating of 5 means that you do not feel particularly favorable or unfavorable.

- 1) Homosexuals
- 2) Welfare Recipients
- 3) Military
- 4) Federal Government
- 5) Mitt Romney
- 6) Barack Obama
- 7) Democrats
- 8) Liberals
- 9) Labor Unions
- 10) Conservatives
- 11) Republicans

Section 2, Political Preferences continued.

Please indicate how much you support or oppose each of the following policies.

Strongly Oppose      Oppose Neutral Support Strongly Support

- 1) Legalized abortion under any circumstances.
- 2) Building a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border to stop illegal immigration.
- 3) Capital punishment (i.e., the death penalty).
- 4) Making it harder to purchase a handgun in the U.S.
- 5) Allowing concealed-carry permits for those who have never been convicted of a crime and have passed a gun safety test.
- 6) Universal health insurance.
- 7) Using federal funds for embryonic stem cell research.
- 8) Allowing same-sex couples to legally marry.
- 9) Teaching intelligent design as an alternative theory to evolution in public schools.
- 10) Assisted Suicide for terminally ill patients.
- 11) The Tea Party Movement.
- 12) The Occupy Wall Street Movement.
- 13) Raising taxes to reduce the federal budget deficit.
- 14) Building a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border to stop illegal immigration.
- 15) Legalized abortion under any circumstances.
- 16) Using federal funds for embryonic stem cell research.
- 17) Making it harder to purchase a handgun in the U.S.
- 18) Universal health insurance.
- 19) Assisted Suicide for terminally ill patients.
- 20) The Tea Party Movement.
- 21) The Occupy Wall Street Movement.
- 22) Capital punishment (i.e., the death penalty).

- 23) Raising taxes to reduce the federal budget deficit.
- 24) Allowing concealed-carry permits for those who have never been convicted of a crime and have passed a gun safety test.
- 25) Allowing same-sex couples to legally marry.
- 26) Teaching intelligent design as an alternative theory to evolution in public schools.

Section 3, Social Dominance Orientation and Right Wing Authoritarian battery.

Now indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

- 1) I support my country's leaders even if I disagree with their actions.
- 2) America is a better country than most others.
- 3) I see myself as a typical American.
- 4) The United States is virtually always right.
- 5) The world would be better if more people from other countries were like Americans.
- 6) I support U.S. policies for the very reason that they are the policies of my country.
- 7) I express my attachment to America by supporting efforts at positive change.
- 8) It makes me feel very good when I see the American flag flying.
- 9) If I criticize the United States, I do so out of love of country.
- 10) There is too much criticism of the U.S. in the world, and we as its citizens should not criticize it.
- 11) People should work hard to move this country in a positive direction.
- 12) For the most part, people who protest and demonstrate against U.S. policy are good, upstanding, intelligent people.
- 13) People who do not wholeheartedly support America should live elsewhere.
- 14) It makes me feel very proud when I hear the national anthem.
- 15) When talking about Americans, I often say "we" instead of "they."
- 16) Being American is very important to me.
- 17) I believe that U.S. policies are almost always the morally correct ones.
- 18) The term American describes me quite well.
- 19) I oppose some U.S. policies because I care about my country and want to improve it.

Section 4, Social Dominance Orientation and Right Wing Authoritarianism Battery Continued.  
Finally, we have some experimental questions which we like to test for future research. Some of these questions may seem odd, but just answer them as best you can. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral Agree      Strongly Agree

- 1) The only way our country can get through the crisis ahead is to get back to our traditional values, put some tough leaders in power, and silence the troublemakers spreading bad ideas.
- 2) Everyone should have their own lifestyle, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences, even if it makes them different from everyone else.
- 3) It is always better to trust the judgment of the proper authorities in government and religion than to listen to the noisy rabble-rousers in our society who are trying to create doubt in people's minds.
- 4) Our country needs free thinkers who have the courage to defy traditional ways, even if this upsets many people.
- 5) God's laws about abortion, pornography and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late, and those who break them must be strongly punished.
- 6) Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us.
- 7) The established authorities generally turn out to be right about things, while the radicals and protestors are usually just "loud mouths" showing off their ignorance.
- 8) Some of the best people in our country are those who are challenging our government, criticizing religion, and ignoring the "normal way things are supposed to be done."
- 9) What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path.
- 10) There is no "one right way" to live life; everybody has to create their own way.

APPENDIX 4-SAMPLE SURVEY PAGE FROM TEST COHORT:

PPP 2012 FINAL

**Please indicate how much you support or oppose each of the following policies.**

	Strongly Oppose	Oppose	Neutral	Support	Strongly Support
Assisted Suicide for terminally ill patients.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making it harder to purchase a handgun in the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Raising taxes to reduce the federal budget deficit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Capital punishment (i.e., the death penalty).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allowing same-sex couples to legally marry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border to stop illegal immigration.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Tea Party Movement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allowing concealed-carry permits for those who have never been convicted of a crime and have passed a gun safety test.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Legalized abortion under any circumstances.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching intelligent design as an alternative theory to evolution in public schools.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Universal health insurance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using federal funds for embryonic stem cell research.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Occupy Wall Street Movement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## **Vita**

Travis O. Smart was born in Rutherfordton, NC, USA . He attended grade school and high school in Rutherford County, NC, graduating in 1992. After serving in the United States Navy for several years, he attended Isothermal Community College in Spindale, NC, from where he graduated with an Associate of Arts in December 2005. Thereafter, he applied and was accepted at Appalachian State University, from where he graduated with a double major in History and Political Science in 2009. In fall of 2010, he was accepted into the ASU Political Science program in the Government and Justice Studies department. Graduating in August of 2013, he will commence work in the profession of teaching. His parents are Steve and Carolyn Smart of Rutherford County, NC.